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9 September 1958

PROBABLE SOVIET POSITIONS AT A TECHNICAL
CONFERENCE ON MEASURES TO AVERT SURPRISE ATTACK

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The Soviet approach to a technical conference on averting possibilities of surprise attack would, of course, reflect the general Soviet position on disarmament.* It would reflect the broad aim of enhancing Soviet security, both by reducing the likelihood of nuclear war, and by moving toward limitations on the most threatening aspects of Western military power. The negotiations at the conference of experts on nuclear test controls have shown that the Soviets may be willing to entertain certain military limitations for themselves and accept some inspection controls if they judge that from an agreement they will obtain a net gain to their security.

2. Four general Soviet diplomatic aims could be served in experts' talks: (a) keeping alive the disarmament issue, in a forum in which the appearance of Soviet initiative can be maximized; (b) preparing

* See SNIE 11-6-58: The Soviet Attitude Toward Disarmament, 24 June 1958, SECRET; especially the Conclusions and the Appendix, paras. 12-17 and 21-24.

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a specific issue generating pressure for a Summit meeting (perhaps along with the nuclear test issue); (c) possible start of a "rolling stone" effect which, again along with the nuclear test issue, may lead to sufficient popular pressure on Western governments to make them more pliable on some disarmament issues; and (d) a further step to tie "surprise attack" prevention measures ultimately to a ban on nuclear weapons, and in the interim to lesser geographical limitations and other inhibitions on use of nuclear weapons.

3. Measures to avert surprise attack are by their nature so encompassing as in effect to embrace the entire disarmament field. Inspection (observation) is insufficient to provide wholly adequate safeguards, at least in respect to certain weapons systems; limitations on numbers and deployment of at least some weapons almost certainly would become involved. The Soviets will have recognized the difficulty of keeping these issues within a technical framework, as well as the inherent tendency of the subject to lead to proposals for a more comprehensive system of control than they are now prepared to contemplate. Probably no reliable forecast of their conduct in these talks can be inferred from their relatively businesslike approach to the nuclear test talks. In the latter the subject was narrow and was related to an objective they had long pursued, limitations on nuclear weapons. More-

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any significant information on detection techniques not already know to the other side. Discussion of methods of insuring against surprise attack will open up the whole range of disarmament questions proper, including disclosure of military information. When this happens the Soviets will probably try to limit discussion to disarmament measures they have pushed in the past. It is possible that in anticipation of this outcome they will enter the talks with the frank intention to give them a political turn from the outset, or will at some stage provoke a breakdown in a propaganda context favorable to themselves.

4. The Soviet approach will be framed within a number of important constraints: (a) as is evident from various Soviet statements and behavior, they do not now have confidence that any form or extent of inspection would assure prevention of surprise attack, nor have they decided that such a result would be in their interest; (b) the deeply ingrained aversion to inspection activities by foreigners in the USSR, while perhaps modified, has not been dispelled; (c) the Soviets would be reluctant to lose the relative advantage they now possess in terms of military information about the potential enemy; (d) the Soviets are not prepared to neutralize such military advantages as they might believe they now have (e.g., in the long-range missile and satellite vehicle field). Within these limits, the Soviets retain a considerable latitude for diplomatic and technical discussions.

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II. LIKELY SOVIET PROPOSALS AND POSITIONS

Areas of Observation and Control

5. These constraints, as well as the record of past Soviet proposals, indicate that the Soviet delegation would be likely to stress a zonal approach to a control system, and would try to avoid discussion of any comprehensive system applicable to the whole of Soviet and US territory. In particular, as already forecast in Khrushchev's note of July 2, 1958, they will almost certainly revive their proposal for a 1600km. zone of inspection and control in Central Europe. This proposal will probably constitute their initial negotiating position, to which they may add other zones and features as the needs of the negotiation require. For example, their proposal for a zone covering equal areas of the eastern USSR and the Western US might be advanced again if the US presented its proposal for an Arctic zone. But they will probably not be willing to widen zones of inspection beyond what they have already proposed, except under pressure, and perhaps not then.

6. In response to the US position that the experts discuss zones for "illustrative purposes only, but without prejudging in any way the boundaries within which such measures would be applied," the Soviets will probably argue that the requirements for various zones would be

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different and that the most convenient and suitable "illustrative" zone would be that covered by their proposal for Central Europe. They might calculate that if and when an inspection system covering that area had been agreed by the experts, the West would be in a weak position to refuse its acceptance at a later political negotiation. They will recall that they enjoyed some propaganda success in Western Europe in 1957 with their exploitation of the disengagement theme; consideration of a European zone ties in readily with this.

7. To objections that a Central European zone would provide no assurances against the most likely form of surprise attack, i. e., the use of long-range missiles and aircraft, the Soviets would probably argue the following advantages: (a) reduction of tensions in an area where major combat forces of the two sides are deployed and where there is always the possibility of accidental encounters; (b) the system would be easiest for both sides to install in this area and that therefore it is the most suitable as a pilot zone to test procedures and techniques; and, (c) other zones involve technical questions or raise issues of confidence which cannot be resolved at this time. To sustain this line of argument they would rely heavily on the implication that they were showing themselves willing to take the first practical steps whereas the Western Powers insistence upon a broader and impractical system really meant that they wanted no progress at all.

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8. Previous Soviet proposals for a zone in Central Europe have included provisions for a reduction of forces in the area and limitations on the weapons which can be stationed there. In particular, they will attempt to obtain a prohibition on stationing of nuclear weapons in the area -- not only to effect a retraction of US power and to prevent West German acquisition of such weapons, but also to support the argument that if inspection were extended to cover the US and the USSR it should be accompanied by a general ban on nuclear weapons.

9. In general, the Soviet approach is likely to insist that assurance against surprise attack is inseparable from the reduction of forces and the elimination of certain weapons. They will probably take the view that no system can be effective if it is limited to observation of the forces presently or prospectively in being. Khrushchev's letter of 2 July states that control measures should be "combined with definite disarmament steps." But the Soviets are likely to stand on the force reduction proposals they have previously made. They will also against press a ban on the use of nuclear weapons as the most essential step, and will insist on US withdrawal from overseas bases as a necessary part of any comprehensive system.

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Objects of Inspection

10. The point of departure for the Soviet position will probably be their old proposals listing railway junctions, big ports, and motor highways as the primary objects of inspection. This is consonant with their insistence on a zone in Central Europe and with their belief, or pretended belief, that the form of surprise attack against which assurance is needed is invasion across frontiers with large bodies of troops.

11. The Soviets' position on the inclusion of airfields has been contradictory. In general, in the past year, they have expressed a willingness to include these only at a later stage in disarmament (sometimes specified as after a ban on nuclear weapons). In his October 1957 interview with Reston, Khrushchev justified the removal of airfields from the list of observation posts because "it is useless to create control posts to watch obsolete aircraft." This is at variance with later proposals (and other comments by Khrushchev) which have stated that airfields could be inspected but only at a later stage, presumably because they are more, rather than less important than, for example, rail junctions. The note of 2 July contains no reference to airfields. Probably the Soviet position will be that these can be included only after a trial system of other objects have been shown to be effective, confidence has been established, and then only in conjunction with

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force reductions and a nuclear weapons ban. There is nothing in their previous positions to prevent their entering a discussion of the purely technical question of the airfield as an object of inspection, however, and they will probably consent to do this at some stage.

12. The Soviets doubtless assume that the US may raise the question of control over long-range missile sites. Here again they will probably argue that these could be included only at a final stage when confidence in the system is fully established. They will also insist that these can be considered only in conjunction with US overseas airbases and naval forces. They might argue that the nature of these weapons is such that mere observation and inspection cannot prevent their use for surprise attack. More importantly, they would probably counter that the crucial problem was not the delivery system but the nuclear warheads, and thus link the problem of missiles to their demand for the abolition of the nuclear weapons as such.

Means and Methods of Inspection

13. It is unlikely that the Soviets will enter the talks with any fully developed proposals regarding the techniques, means, and methods to be employed. They probably do not yet believe that the prospects for such a system coming into existence are very real, and have probably not decided that the whole alteration of the military-political strategic

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picture which would result from a comprehensive and effective system would be in their interest. With respect to technical details therefore they will prefer to play a waiting game, seeking a maximum disclosure of US ideas in order to obtain a clearer picture of what concessions would be involved in any system applied within the USSR. In pushing for consideration of a zone in Europe, however, they may have some specific proposals to offer with respect to objects and methods of control there.

14. By the note of July 2 they are committed to "aerial surveys in areas that are of major importance from the viewpoint of preventing a surprise attack." They have also previously agreed to "some" aerial inspection within their proposed European zone. They will probably not initiate proposals for a wider application of this technique and will seek to limit its consideration as much as possible. Insofar as their opposition is supported by purely technical arguments, they may argue (a) that aerial inspection is ineffective alone and has only a marginal usefulness as a supplement to ground observation; (b) that processing of aerial photos over extensive areas is too large and slow a task to be practical; and (c) that the cost of aerial inspection would be prohibitive.

15. The Soviet position will also be concerned to minimize as much as possible the need for mobility on the part of ground observers. They will probably argue for the adequacy of fixed posts, but will not oppose

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the principle of mobility outright. They will seek to keep any formula on this subject as vague and limiting as possible.

16. With respect to communications, numbers and kinds of personnel, and other technical questions the Soviets are unlikely to make any extensive proposals of their own. They will be interested primarily in probing US thinking, and in limiting the scale of the proposals introduced for discussion.